

Nerima Home Companion: Paying Respects

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Summary: Ranma in the style of Garrison Keillor: twenty years in the future, Soun Tendo passes away, and...

Nerima Home Companion: Paying Respects

[The stage is dimly lit, and empty, and the audience awaits the featured

>speaker. He walks onstage, carrying a metre-high three-legged stool.

He sets it down, center stage front, and as the spotlight falls upon

>him, we notice the dark circles under his eyes. He has aged twenty

years or so since we recall him, but it is clearly Hikaru

Gosunkugi.

>His days of dabbling with voodoo long behind him, he now holds forth

weekly on this very stage, and his gravy-like voice (well, it's brown

>and lumpy, anyway, as he would say) is carried across Japan on NHK

public radio.

>
[The audience is silent as he begins his monologue:]

>
"It's been a quiet week in the Nerima district of Tokyo, my hometown...

>
=====

>
NERIMA HOME COMPANION:

>Paying Respects
a Ranma 1/2 fanfiction by Ukyou Kuonji

>
with all respect paid to Rumiko Takahashi and Garrison Keillor

>
=====

>
It's been a quiet week in the Nerima district of Tokyo, my hometown --

>which is really rather unusual. Even more so, when you consider all

the folks that showed up there again after long absences. Soun Tendo

>passed away a little while back, and everybody, but everybody had to

return to pay their respects.

>
Even me. I don't go back very often, I'll admit, for all the talking

>I do about the place. Matter of fact, it's all the talking I do that

tends to render me somewhat unwelcome there. The district got enough

>unwanted publicity back in the days when a Ms. Takahashi made a comic

book series out of the strange goings-on there when I was still in high

>school. Now, the fact that a former resident is making a profit off

the curious events in Nerima is sufficient for some to regard me as a

>bit of a turncoat. I can understand it, and I accept it. So I stay

away, most of the time. Like Nabiki, I still have my sources, though.

>
But for Mr. Tendo's funeral, I had to go back. Besides, there's

>something about a funeral that causes everyone to be more civil. You

remember how long it's been since you've last seen so-and-so, and how

>they don't look as good as they used to, and how you'd better make

their last remembrance of you as pleasant as possible. Meanwhile,

>they're thinking the same thing about you, so all around, everyone

acts a little nicer toward everyone else, and everyone feels a little

>more comfortable. That's an important thing in a place like Nerima,

where comfort can be a fleeting commodity.

>
Not only were folks actually civil for a change, but even the mourning

>itself was rather subdued. Not that there weren't plenty of tears for

old man Tendo -- he was a good man, and he'll be sorely missed -- but

>the flow wasn't anything more than he himself could have conjured up

from his own eyes, given a good excuse... or even a flimsy one. Even

>then, it was enough to eclipse the funeral of former PM Hashimoto, as

far as actual grief goes.

>
Even the district councilmen sent a ridiculously large wreath to the

>dojo in his memory. As if the place wasn't conspicuous enough already,

now Ranma and Akane had to contend with this eight-foot crepe, sagging

>under the weight of Kami alone knows how many and what kind of flowers.

There was no good place to put it but outside the gates until the actual

>funeral. Only Ryoga himself could miss the place now. Neither Akane

nor Ranma liked the thing, but it wouldn't be polite to just get rid of it.

>Nor would they let their son Akima use it as a practice dummy, much

as Ranma may have liked the idea in theory. Their younger daughter

>Noriko suggested picking a few flowers out at a time and bringing them

to her flower-arranging class. Unfortunately, at that rate, she figured

>it might take a year or so to dismantle the thing...

>It's really rather strange, having a funeral in Nerima. Sometimes

you'd think no one ever dies here. Certainly, Happosai and Cologne are

>both still alive and kicking, proof positive that only the good die

young. Or is it that only the young die good?

>
So I had to go a see what it would be like, and to possibly even catch
>up with a lot of people I hadn't seen in a while. Once I got out on

the road, though, I remembered one other reason why I hadn't been back
>in so long. I may only live a few wards away, nearer to downtown

Tokyo, but it still takes some three hours to drive out there, with all
>the traffic and the convoluted roads -- and the inevitable construction
(or destruction) projects.
>
Needless to say, all that travel makes one both hungry and nostalgic,
>and Ucchan's Okonomiyaki-ya is the perfect place to satisfy both needs
even now. As I walked in, I recognized a number of regulars as
>classmates from Furinkan -- in fact, I dare say the entire chem club

had shown up there for lunch today. Of course, they'd long since

>traded in their high-collared school uniforms for the jacket and tie of
the engineer salaryman, but with their glasses and shirt pockets
>bulging with pens, you could tell they were the same nerds they'd been
in high school; they were just older, and making a living with it,
>rather than being ostracized for it.

>Ukyou continues to tend the grill, side-by-side with Konatsu. Age
hasn't caught up with their appearances, but there's certainly a world-
>weariness in Ukyou's eyes that wasn't there before, at least, not to
this extent. The two of them seem to have weathered thick and thin
>together over the past nearly twenty years -- they'd be a perfect
match, you know. But try asking if there's more than appearances to
>their arrangement, and Konatsu will just smile sadly. And Ukyou?

Well, depending on her mood, she might send you flying out the door
>courtesy of her trademark spatula, or just laugh mirthlessly. She
never got over Ranma's marriage, and claims to have joined the ranks of
>inveterate spinsters from that day forth. Others aren't so sure...

there are whispers that she and Konatsu may well marry or get married,
>but it'll be a secret thing when it happens, and she'll deny it to her
dying day -- unless one of them get pregnant, and I'm not quite sure
>which one it'll be that does.

>As you well know, 'okonomi-yaki' means 'as you like it,' or words to
that effect, and Ucchan's lives up to that. Up to a point. You can
>have anything to eat that you want, provided that it's okonomi-yaki.

There once was a poor fool who made the mistake of asking if the place
>served ramen. He was given what could be diplomatically referred to as
'an invitation to the world,' and he got to see most of it upon being
>sent into low Earth orbit for his transgression.

>Ramen, in particular, is a touchy subject with Ukyou, because it's a
constant reminder of her real arch-rival, Shampoo. Never mind that

>both of them lost in the battle for Ranma's heart, and never mind that
Ukyou has always gotten on well with Akane, the one who defeated them

>both. The two restaurateurs just don't get along, though it doesn't
ever seem to have much to do with the restaurant business. Maybe it

>has to do with Shampoo's husbands...

>Since losing Ranma, Shampoo has gone through five husbands in the
course of fifteen years. Now, this would normally be a major topic of

>local gossip, but this is Nerima, and everyone there is above that sort
of thing. Besides, they all know the story, anyway. Turns out that

>defeating an Amazon is the easy part. What's hard is to conquer her
every night, night after night. Apparently, her stamina in the boudoir

>is unmatched by any male, although five strong men have died of
exhaustion so far trying to prove otherwise. So, she's got quite a

>collection of white cheongsams to wear to the funeral: A five-time
widow must dress the part, after all.

>
The irony is that the one person who probably could have satisfied her

>and survived she has passed over all five times. Believe it or not,
Mousse still works at the NekoHanten, still cleaning up the place,

>still too gentle to actually beat Shampoo up as tradition demands,
still believing the she'll come to her senses naturally some day. And

>still wearing those rotten glasses, too. He tried contact lenses one
time, and upon seeing the world clearly for the first time, decided he

>didn't like it. What he saw must have been just too intense for him.
Between Shampoo's unreachable beauty and Cologne's indescribable

>ugliness, it didn't surprise me one bit to find out he was back to his
glasses within a week. Besides, he was seeing spots in the cafe he'd

>missed umpteen times while cleaning that had transformed into
intractable stains. Even industrial-strength cleansers couldn't get

>the dirt out that he was seeing. Best not to see it, and at least
think the job is done, than to see clearly that the job will never

>get done sufficiently.

>I'm not sure I agree with his point of view, personally. A clear image
of some other girl might be preferable to the fuzzy vision he has of

>Shampoo, and he might come to his senses. Of course, I'm one to
talk: I can't bear the thought of sticking something in my eye like

>that to begin with; so here I am wearing glasses as I'm telling you
this. Still, it allows me a sort of folksy, homespun look that serves

>me well.

>I should point out at this juncture that I wasn't the only one to have
come in from downtown Tokyo for this occasion - Nabiki Tarou had

>actually come in several days earlier in order to make most of the
funeral arrangements. Yes, you heard me right: Nabiki TAROU. Old

>Pansuto never did manage to get his name changed, but there was a point
a number of years back when some American tourist interrupted him
>during one of his usual Happosai-related tirades. The gaijin pointed
out that, to his ears, 'Pansuto' sounded more like 'pantsuit' than
>'pantyhose.'

>It was like divine inspiration had struck. Tarou thanked the Yank
profusely (had the fellow only known how rare an occasion this was, he
>would have considered himself the luckiest man on earth), went out and
traded in his hosiery and dragon-scale tunic for a couple of Italian-
>made suits, and went into business as a stockbroker. Of course, what
the Yank had failed to mention was that pantsuits were worn primarily
>by American businessWOMEN, but Kami knows, I'm not about to be the one
to break the news to him.
>
Pansuto took to the stock market like a fish to water, as well he
>might. Between his remarkable intellect and utter contempt for others,
this was a profession that suited him very nicely, if you'll pardon the
>expression. His 'people are idiots' attitude served him well at the
Nikkei, which was just about to turn into a feast for the bearish. And
>despite his cursed form, Tarou was a bear among bears. He made massive
fortunes daily, feeding off companies grown fat and lazy, investing (if
>that is the proper term for it) in fleets of corporate jets to fly off
to worldwide meetings, mahogany desks for the big honchos, and
>grandiloquent skyscrapers in downtown Tokyo rather than actually
plowing their earnings back into their operations, where it might do
>them some good. The news that 'the Minotaur is knocking' sent many a
CEO scurrying off in fear, trying to figure out what to jettison in
>order to render his company seaworthy in the eyes of investors. All to
no avail. For Tarou to sell a company short was a virtual death knell,
>and the other bears on the Nikkei followed him everywhere.

>Needless to say, such moneymaking ability was not about to escape the
notice of Nabiki Tendo, who hadn't seen a man with such financial
>acumen since the days when she was still dating (if you could call it
that) Kinnosuke. It wasn't long before she challenged him to a stock-
>picking contest, which, much to his surprise (but not hers) she won.
They began going out together, and Tarou was astonished as he began
>interfacing with a mind as sharp and contemptuous as his own -- and
loving every minute of it. Of course, marrying Nabiki meant having
>'fem-boy' as a brother-(sister?-)in-law, but Ranma was enough fun to
tease that having to deal with him was reasonably worthwhile. And what
>the hell... it wasn't as if he HAD to drop in on the dojo very

often;
just the occasional family function now and again.

>
Not even then sometimes, as I found out to my peril. When I finished

>with my meal, I went straight from the Ucchan to the dojo, only to find
the place deserted. Turns out, the funeral was being held at the Tofu

>Clinic. I guess I should have known. Martial artists may meet and fight
at the dojo, and they still do -- I hardly need to mention that, you've

>heard me tell about so many times -- but social gatherings (I mean those
without fighting at their center) revolve around food, and there is

>none greater than Kasumi Ono when it comes to that. Besides, the quiet
gentle nature of herself and her dear doctor are a refreshing oasis, a

>sea of tranquility in the urban moonscape that is Nerima. No one pointed
out the irony of using a doctor's office for a memorial service; Soun

>deserved a quiet dignified send-off, and if he couldn't get it at the
clinic, he wouldn't get one anywhere, and everyone knew it.

>

>
Folks don't go in much for irony here in Nerima, or there would have been

>a fair amount of commentary about the examination table upon which
Soun was laid out in his casket. Not more than two weeks before,

>Shampoo had been lying on that selfsame table, face-down. She had
endured one of the main indignities of being a victim of a Jusenkyo

>curse. Whereas Genma will now and again wind up behind bars, treated
like the endangered species his cursed form is (and, to be fair, loving

>every minute of it), and Ryoga occasionally is threatened with becoming
someone's next meal (thank heavens that Nerimans seem to insist on

>boiling their meat before actually cooking it), so Shampoo has to deal
with malicious children every so often. A pair of teenage boys found

>her wandering around, and decided to tie a string of cans to her tail.
In her human form, she practically needed the services of a proctologist

>to remove them... fortunately, Dr. Tofu is sufficiently skilled as a
general practitioner that this did not pose him a great deal of

>difficulty.

>Once freed of this nuisance, Shampoo set about getting even with her
tormentors. As it turned out, they weren't all that hard to find.

>There are some folks that still don't seem to know about the curses,
and these boys were apparantly among them. So they never thought to

>hide from Shampoo when she went out looking for them. Of course, if
they'd known, they would never have been so stupid as to pick *that*

>cat to tease... but this is Nerima, after all, where everyone's entitled
to be as stupid as they choose to be.

>
Indeed, not only didn't they hide from her, they actually showed up at

>the NekoHanten shortly after Shampoo's little medical procedure.
She spotted them straightaway, and shoved Mousse aside to wait
>on them personally.

>"Can Shampoo take your order?"

>One of the boys gave a snorty nose-laugh ("Fhhnn-hhnn!"), while the other
grinned. "I dunno... you gonna gave us a bottle for us to yell our orders
>into it?" Shampoo's eye twitched at this, but she struggled to keep a
smile on her face... it was starting to get tight enough to hurt.
>
"You know what Shampoo mean. You ready order, yes?"
>
The Snorter waved her off. "Not just yet, okay? We're gonna take our
>time with this." She responded with a noncommittal look before turning
around and heading for the kitchen, trying to figure out what to do next.
>It was then that she heard them:

>"D'ja get a load of the dumb chink?" "Hhnn-hhnn-hhnn." High falsetto:
"'Can Shampoo take your order?'" "Hhnn-hhnn-hhnn."

>
That tore it. She put on the sweetest face she could muster, spun around,
>and headed back to their table. She had to make an effort, though, not
to appear *too* eager.
>
"Shampoo forget! Have chef specials in kitchen... you come see and choose,
>yes?" She took the Snorter by the hand, and the other kid barely had time
to protest before she'd grabbed his in turn. It wasn't too long before
>they found themselves in the NekoHanten kitchens.

>The Smart-aleck looked around, but didn't see anything prepared for him
and his buddy to choose from. "Okay... so, uh, where's the specials?"
>
"You just wait." Shampoo was already up on a stepstool, reaching for a
>packet of powder. "Shampoo mix special drink for you two... Hiba-chan!"

>Cologne's head popped into view, and the boys clutched each other in
fear and surprise. "What is it, Shampoo?" Then, the old woman noticed
>the two alarmed boys, and her face wrinkled (assuming there was room for
more on her face) in irritation. "You two are new faces around here, I
>take it..."

>They relaxed their grip on each other as they realized they were talking
to a person rather than some ghostly troll. Matter of fact, they backed
>away from each other rather hurriedly, as it occurred to them that they
had been holding onto each other. "Uh... yeah, that's true..."
>
Shampoo handed the packet to Cologne, and gabbled something to her in
>the Amazon dialect. Cologne nodded as she took the powder, taking a
quick glance at the boys, who were now back to their insolent selves.
>Even more so, as the old troll hopped away, returning in less than a
minute with a pitcher full of ice cold water.
>
"Special drink, huh?" Smartass was staring at the pitcher.
"Whatcha got

>in there, some 'ancient Chinese secret'? Huh?"

>"Hhhnnn-hhnn."

>Shampoo just smiled, and set the pitcher down on the counter next to the
two boys. "Is something like that. Shampoo get glasses for you two."

>She clambered up onto the counter to reach for some rather elaborate-
looking mugs...

>
...and in rummaging around, kicked the pitcher of instant Maoniichuan

>over onto the two boys. "Ooops! Shampoo so clumsy! Must dry stupid
boys off!" But of course, they weren't boys at this point.

>
She leaped down from the counter, and grabbed the two cats by their

>haunches. Both of them were squirming frantically trying to get out
of this madwoman's grasp. But they were fighting against three thousand

>years of Amazon tradition; there was no way they were about to free
themselves.

>
Until one of them, in his terror, simply lost control. Even a revenge-

>bent Shampoo isn't going to hold onto a cat when it's wetting on her.
She let go, and the cat landed rather hard on its back. It took only

>a second or two to recover, and began scrambling off in whatever
direction it could, trying to escape.

>
But Shampoo has more experience at being a cat than most folks, including

>these boys. So while the escapee managed to get out of the NekoHanten,
he didn't get much farther before being caught. Once she had both cats

>well in hand, she proceeded to tie their tails *together*. The two cats
attempted to run off in different directions, and wound up dragging each

>other in a direction that lay somewhere between their individual
destinations. Shampoo smiled maliciously. That'd teach them.

Their

>rear ends would be so sore from all that pulling, it'd be as effective
as having given them both a thorough spanking, without the possibility

>of their enjoying it, like Mousse might.

>Say what you will about eye-for-an-eye vigilante justice, it certainly
gives the former victim a great deal of satisfaction. Shampoo even went

>so far as to say that at that moment, as she went scrambling after the
escapee, and later, as she watched the two cats skitter through the

>NekoHanten alley in a sort of zig-zag route, she had never felt so...
alive. Not human, maybe, but alive. And that's what matters, ne?

>

>
Lying on that same examination table,Soun, on the other hand, was

>quite clearly dead. To be sure, he looked pretty good, as tasteless
and cliché that might be to say of a corpse. His skin, though somewhat

>pale, was unwrinkled despite his nearly seventy years, years in which
the rivers of tears he cried might have etched canyons on a lesser

> man's face. His hair, too, was still quite full and dark, a situation
even Ranma is beginning to envy as he approaches the milestone
>of his fortieth year. But that's another story, and shall be told at
another time.
>
There is no talk about how it happened, which strikes me as rather
>odd. Certainly, if a martial artist dies fighting, it is a matter of great
honor (and perhaps vengeance); if a suicide, one would expect certain
>reactions in accordance with the situation. I don't recall anything
being said about any long illness, either...
>
And it's not like Nerima keeps its secrets very well; if nothing else,
>there's always Nagisa, the elder Saotome daughter, who's following
in her aunt Nabiki's footsteps. If you really need information - and
>can afford it - she's the one to go to. But even she's not talking.

She's never one to admit when she doesn't know, though...

>
[Gosunkugi pauses to run his hand meaningfully through his own
>greying hair]

>Personally, I think he's been dyeing his hair all this time, and

whatever's in that stuff finally caught up with him. Folks around
>here are generally suspicious of chemicals, and for good reason

(witness most folks' reaction to Kodachi Kunou, after all). Of course,
> maybe I'm just jealous, too...

>*****

>The funeral itself, as I said before, was quite civil for Nerima.
Genma did his part to set a sober mood. Not once did he turn into a
>panda, and even at the buffet table in the kitchen, he was quite

restrained -- he only took three helpings of curried chicken with
>rice. When he walked up to the casket, he set up the Go board on

his old friend's chest. He wasn't going to be playing Go again, anyway.
>Both he and Soun had tried to teach Nodoka the game, but she just
didn't play fair; she simply wouldn't let them cheat. So with Soun gone,
>all the fun was out of the game, and Genma knew it. In tribute to his
longtime partner, he had set the board up on Soun's chest in an endgame
>position for black to win -- Soun's color. At the last, Genma had cheated
to give Soun the victory.
>
Happosai added a tribute of his own to his weak-willed disciple; a pair
>of purple silk panties with a sheer mesh in the front panel. Typical
Happosai. Some folks were quite naturally disgusted, others were curious
>as to whose they might have been (some even whispered that Happi was

finally returning a pair that had belonged to Soun's long-dead wife),
>and others realized, looking at the garment, that this was a great

sacrifice indeed for the Master to make, and high praise indeed for
>his former student.

>Of course, not everyone approached Happi's offering with such reverence:
"Frederique! Frederique!"

>
A short, pudgy woman bounded forward to the casket, and nimbly slipped the

>panty from Soun's fingers. She clutched it to her own breast as if it was
hers, and from her demeanor, it was pretty clear she already thought it was.

>
"Azusa, set that back where it belongs... have a little respect for the dead,

>will you?" Mikado Sanzenin approached his wife, snatching the garment from
her and placing it back in the casket. Azusa's eyes went wide and teary,

>and then she began to look wildly about for something, anything... she had
to get her Fredrique back from Mikki-chan.

>
She grabbed The Wreath.

>
"Give me back my Fredrique!" Mikado stared, transfixed, as eight feet of

>solid flowers came crashing down upon him. As unconsciousness descended
upon him with the flowers, he wondered why he had been so stupid as to sleep

>with his dim-bulb partner some eighteen years ago, and wind up forced into
'doing the right thing' by her when something went horribly wrong shortly

>thereafter. He had spent the last eighteen years discovering just how
horribly wrong things had gone.

>
So had their son. Seventeen-year-old Naruhito Sanzenin buried his face in

>his hands, and was wondering for the umpteenth-millionth time very much the
same thought as his father was. His parents never failed to embarrass him

>in public. Between his mother's weird kleptomania and his father's
philandering, he was convinced that he had drawn nearly the worst parents in

>the world. He never went so far in his mind as to wish that his mother had
gotten an abortion rather than marry his father, but he certainly wished

>time and again that the two idiots that he was forced to call 'parents' had
used some kind of protection... or maybe not 'done it' at all! Why, if

>they'd delayed by a few seconds, someone else could have put their quarter
into the great cosmic vending machine before they had, and he could have

>wound up with a completely different set of parents, maybe in a completely
different part of the world. Why, he wondered, couldn't he have been born

>to some nice couple in Minnesota, say, where things are quiet and normal,
and parents don't embarrass their children the way Mikado and Azusa did to

>Naruhito? He couldn't even muster the nerve to ask a girl out, for fear
that she might run away screaming upon meeting the Golden Pair of Fools.

>
Just as this thought crossed his mind, a vision stood up to confront his

>squabbling parents (Mikado had by this time recovered from the blow to
the head, and was matching his wife decibel for decibel). A girl of

>about sixteen, clad in flowing white, like an angel or goddess, eyes
filled with righteous fury. "Will you two idiots STOP THIS AT ONCE!"

>Her image filled Naruhito's gaze: *this* was a girl he could take

home
without fear. He watched, transfixed, as she pulled a coin from her
>pocket...

>...and drained all the fight out of his parents, who fell to the floor
unconscious and shrivelled. The girl transformed into a voluptuous
>brunette of some forty years, and Naruhito's face fell. Only his hands
were there to catch it before it landed in his lap.

>

>
Perhaps Naruhito would have found comfort in the fact that he was not

>alone when it came to being embarrassed by his parents. Of course, he
would have been unaware of Yoiko Hibiki's frustration, as neither she

>nor her parents had arrived at the clinic yet. In fact, that was the
main cause of her fury. Couldn't her mom lay off the submissive wife

>bit long enough to insist she take the wheel? It was obvious her dad
was clueless as to how to get back to Nerima, a place where he *claimed*

>to have spent a great deal of time. Yoiko had inherited her mother's
sense of direction, which was a good thing, but her father's temper,

>and her father's sense of direction tended to be what set it off.

>The only good thing she could say about her father in this situation was
that at least he was willing to ask for directions. But even when he asked,

>somehow the information always got tangled up somewhere between the
man's ears and his brain - assuming he *had* one, which Yoiko was prone

>to doubt much of the time:

>Pointing ahead: "So I head south to route...?"

>"That's west, dear."

>"Oh. So I need to turn..."

>"Left, daddy." The tires squeal as the car turns. "DADDY! I said LEFT!
Mommmy!!"

>
"Now, honey, your daddy's been here many times in the past..."

>
Sotto voce: "By accident..."

>
"What was that?"

>
"Nothing, daddy."

>
And so on. Yoiko would glance at her watch from time to time... and

>occasionally it would be glowing with chi energy she'd built up from
fuming at the situation. It wasn't that she was in any hurry to get to

>the funeral - she didn't know Soun Tendo from Adam, and didn't care -
but she had friends she'd met on the Internet that she wanted to try

>to look up while she was in town. She was looking forward to all the
sophisticated things they might do together in the big city - riding

>the subway, shopping the Ginza, visiting some place they called
Soapland... it all sounded like a fairy tale.

>
Akari fretted a bit herself. She was sorely tempted to take the wheel -

>surely she wanted to pay her respects to the families that had helped
bring her and Ryoga-sama together, and unless he

relinquished the
>driving to her, they would not have a chance - but as for Yoiko...

there were temptations to the big city that were too much for a
pig
>farmer's daughter from northern Honshu. She looked back over her

shoulder at her daughter, steaming in her pink sweatshirt with
the
>English legend "I am curious (yellow)" emblazoned diagonally
across
 it from shoulder to hip. Yes, she was too curious for her
own good.
>Better that they not find their way, and she not meet up with those

unsavory characters she'd met on the computer. Who knew what

>they might do to her?

>Each of the Hibikis were so lost in their own thoughts that they
never
noticed when the skyscrapers were upon them. What finally
shook
>each of them was when Ryoga took yet another wrong turn, and ran

into... a hearse. Akari smiled as Ryoga got out to inspect the
damage.
>She had gotten both wishes: they'd made it in time to pay respects

to Soun, and the car would be unavailable for Yoiko to wander
into
>temptation.

>Yoiko buried her face in her lap, as she realized the same thing as

her mother had. She didn't notice as the driver of the hearse,
after
>determining that the 10 kph collision hadn't really affected his
vehicle,
clapped her father on the back, nor did she notice a
second man her
>father's age, dressed in a red Chinese shirt come up to them, asking

for room in her father's car, muttering something about "kids
these
>days...not willing to walk only a couple of miles." She *did*
notice,
however, as her door opened, and she was suddenly joined
by Akima
>Saotome, Yoichi Ono, and Naruhito Sanzenin, while the two Saotome

sisters crowded up front with her mother.
>
Ryoga got back into the car, backed it up a few yards (still
well within
>eyeshot of the hearse), and fell in line behind it as it resumed its
slow
crawl to the crematorium. Suddenly she felt very shy, as she
said
>her hellos to the three boys crammed against her. This wasn't
turning
out to be a total loss...
>
And as the older folks crowded around the two cars, making all
manner
>of noise, I got into my own car and drove off in the opposite
direction.
After all, I had a three-hour drive into downtown
Tokyo to make, and
>I wanted to get home at a reasonable hour. The ol' body needs its

sleep... it ain't what it used to be, you know...
>

>And that's the News from Nerima...
where all the women are strong
(and how!)...
>all the men are... well, they aren't always men, actually...
and
all the craziness is above average.
>

>
I sent this incomplete story well over a year ago, and I've
finally gotten

>around to wrapping it up. This is the sort of thing that looks like
it could
become a passable continuing series. There's also a
large section that
>includes my earlier side story "Tied to the Tail," but I decided to
leave it in
in somewhat abridged format just for the heck of it.

>
I've had a great fondness for Garrison Keillor's works that
harks back

>a long ways, and when the challenge went out to imitate an
well-known
author in a regulation fanfic, it occurred to me to
mimic his style. Once

>I started on this story in earnest, I did try to flip through
'Leaving Home'
and 'Lake Wobegon Days' to try and maintain his
understated style,

>but for the most part, the problem is that Nerima (and the
characters
therein) is wild and crazy while Lake Wobegon is quiet
and ordinary.

>So I decided to focus on the how everyone has changed over time,

and I figured as long as the intro and the ending rang similarly,
and the

>stuff in the middle rambled a bit (I'm good at that, anyway),
everything
would turn out fairly well.

>
I've got another story for this series already in the works -
it's alluded

>to within the body of the tale; the first person to correctly spot
the
reference gets a cookie and a possible cameo in a future fic
- but

>gosh only knows when *that*ll be ready for publication: I've
discovered,
much to my embarrassment, that my unfinished fics now
outnumber

>my completed ones, and after two-plus years of this, that's saying

quite a bit.

>
Anyway, it's a draft... comments are always welcome, you know.

>
Itsu mo,

>Ucchan ^_^

>P.S. My web site's finally been updated! Yay! Drop by when you

get the chance:

>
<http://members.aol.com/ukyoukwnji/index.htm>

>

End
file.